Supporting the transition from Primary to Secondary school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs: a focus on the socio-emotional aspects of transfer for an adolescent boy

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Transitions represent an important milestone for children and are experienced differentially. For some children, transitions represent a *critical* period that can have a long-term impact on their lives. This paper examines the socio-emotional aspects of the transition through an exploration of the findings derived from an evaluative case study of a group-work intervention to support children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Needs across the Primary-Secondary transition, seen through the eyes of an adolescent boy and related stakeholders. The study took place in two local authorities in Scotland. The intervention is informed by the 'Teaching for Understanding Framework' (Project Zero, Harvard University) and 'Multiple Intelligence Theory.' The study examines the impact of the intervention on participating pupils, in the process exploring the variables that impacted on pupil progress both internal and external to the intervention. The findings highlight the importance of: building trustful and respectful relationships between adults and children; creating a safe environment in which children will be listened to and cared for; high quality pedagogy and continuity and progression across the transition; and understanding the complexity of factors which may impact on the transition for individual children, particularly for those who may be at greater risk across it.

Keywords
Primary-Secondary Transition; Social, Emotional and Behavioural Needs; Socio-Emotional Development; Social Constructivism; Multiple Intelligence Theory; Relationships; Belongingness

It has been argued that transitions, as they pertain across the life trajectory, are a natural process (Davis, Ravenscroft, and Bizas 2015; Margetts and Kienig 2013) and an 'inevitable part of life' (Coffey, 2013, 261). In a similar vein, they are oft described in relation to 'rites of passage' (Margetts and Kienig 2013; West, Sweeting, and Young 2010) or a status passage (Symonds 2015) and as 'an important crossroad' or 'turning point' (Hanewald 2013).

Theorists draw attention to the dual nature of transition as it is experienced by children: it combines both a sense of optimism and anticipation with anxiety or fear (Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013; Topping 2011; Zeedyk et al. 2003) and also a period of challenge and/or stress (Davis, Ravenscroft, and Bizas 2015; West, Sweeting, and Young 2010; Zeedyk et al. 2003; Riglin et al. 2013).

A range of commentators highlight that for some children the transition may potentially pose a greater risk than for others (Brewin and Statham 2011; Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008; Leung 2010; Davis, Ravenscroft, and Bizas 2015; Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013; Lester and Cross 2014; Symonds 2015). Symonds, for

example, devotes a chapter to 'vulnerable children' whom she identifies in relation to children with special educational needs, early maturing and ethnic minority children. However, there are dangers in attributing risk to categories of pupils on the basis of shared characteristics on the grounds that insufficient account may be taken of how the individual experiences and interprets their world (mediated by the risk and protective factors in their lives) (Mowat 2015a) or of individual agency (Daniel 2010).

The transition may present as a *critical* period (Neal and Yelland 2014; Brewin and Statham 2011) (the former authors' emphasis) when children may become more susceptible to changing their behaviour for better or worse. For some children living in poverty, their feelings about school, their involvement in learning, their relationships with teachers and aspects of their behaviour decline in the first year post-transition (Neal and Yelland 2014). For such children and young people, coping mechanisms come to the fore (Seiggfe-Krenke 2000). Yet, whilst there has been an increasing interest in the Primary-Secondary transition, and in transitions in general as they relate to children's trajectory from pre-school to post-school destinations, there is only a limited literature which examines the Primary-Secondary transition in relation to pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN).

The case for supporting the transition for pupils with SEBN

Whilst it cannot be assumed that all children who present with SEBN may be at risk on the transition to Secondary school, examination of a range of international and national reports focussing on children's mental health and wellbeing and Scottish Government statistics indicate that they may be at greater risk than the general school population. Drawing from the country specific Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study, in general, as Scottish children get older (spanning 11-15

years), they rate themselves less favourably on a range of subjective measures such as their perceptions of happiness; ability to communicate with their parents; support from teachers and parents; peer relationships; and sense of being included in school (Currie et al. 2015). It has also been identified that children who feel less of an affiliation with school are more likely to present with SEBN (Murphy 2016), as are children living in poverty (Shaw et al. 2016). It would not be unreasonable to surmise that, for children who are well-adjusted (in the sense that most people would understand the term) and/or have strong support systems, the impact on their subjective wellbeing (as outlined within the HBSC (Scotland) study) and on their sense of affiliation to school may be felt less. Supportive relationships with the mother and strong peer relationships act as protective factors in children's lives, reducing the likelihood of at-risk behaviours (OECD 2017).

Around 1/6th of Scottish school children have been categorised as having SEBN and this is a growing trend (Scottish Government 2018b). Indeed, by far, they account for the largest proportion of children who have been identified as having additional support needs (ibid.) yet are among the least likely to have a Co-ordinated Support Plan (Carmichael et al. 2018). The terminology which is used to describe children and young people who present with SEBN varies across the world (Lopez 2014) and is representative of different understandings, philosophical positions and emphases. However, whichever term is adopted, it is a very loosely defined, highly contested umbrella concept (Thomas 2014; Mundschenk and Simpson 2014) which Thomas describes as a 'mélange of disparate ideas' (37), encompassing children and young people presenting with externalising disorders, such as ADHD, through to internalising disorders, such as depression and anxiety (Grigorenko 2014).

Within the Scottish context, the term social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN) (Scottish Government 2017a) is generally adopted as it is more in keeping with the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) which focuses on the additional support which a child requires in order to thrive. However, there is a lack of consistency in the terminology adopted within Scottish Government documentation in referring to this specific group of children; no clear definition as to what it might constitute; and no publicly available data breaking down how it may present or co-present in children or young people (for example, with autism).

Scottish Government statistics also establish that, perhaps not unexpectedly, children who have been identified as having SEBN are much more likely to be excluded temporarily from school than their peers. Whilst there has been a significant reduction in temporary exclusions from Scottish schools, children who have been classified as having additional support needs are five times more likely to be excluded from Secondary school than their counterparts and, of these, by far, the largest category represented is children with SEBN, accounting for 38% (with an even higher proportion in Primary (45%) and Special (43%) schools) (Scottish Government 2018a).

Likewise, five times as many temporary exclusions are accounted for by children in the bottom quintile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) in comparison to those in the top (ibid.) and we have already established that children living in poverty are more likely to be identified as having SEBN (Shaw et al. 2016). For all children there is a steep incline in exclusions from Primary to Secondary school. 80% of temporary exclusions are accounted for by boys (Scottish Government 2018a). Children who at age 12 have been excluded from school are four times more likely to be in prison by age 22 and 15 year olds who were involved in violent crime

were also the most likely to have been victimised or bullied (McAra and Susan McVie 2010). The authors argue that a crucial point at which to intervene to break this relationship is early adolescence. All of the above highlight the importance of supporting the transition for children who have been identified as having SEBN or at risk of developing it.

The intervention

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Approach

Supporting Positive Futures and Transitions (*SPFT*) is a group-work programme based upon social constructivist principles devised by the author. The premise of the approach is that change cannot be imposed externally – it comes from within, related to Deci and Ryan's self-determinist theory or theory of intrinsic motivation (Brophy 2010). According to Neal and Yelland (2014), a focus on pupil agency and intrinsic motivation might be the key to promoting pupil engagement in pupils at risk of disengagement on the transition. As such, the role of the educator is to mediate the child's learning and to create the right conditions under which the child can self-actuate (Bohart 2007). It is about helping children and young people to understand themselves, their interpersonal relationships and the contexts in which they find themselves, particularly important at a point of transition, linking to 'Teaching for Understanding' and 'Multiple Intelligence' theory (to follow).

Head (2014) makes a distinction between compensatory or complementary pedagogies, the former focussing on normalising children's behaviour through external mediators applied by adults where the ends are compliance and obedience; the latter concerned with complementing the skills, abilities and knowledge that children already have, providing a context in which they can be developed collaboratively (96). The latter is very much in keeping with the philosophy of the

support group approach, which, through a range of collaborative activities, seeks to foster discussion, reflection, understanding, thinking skills and dispositions, and the transfer of learning to real contexts.

The initial development of the programme pre-dates SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) (Humphrey 2013) and, whilst there are aspects of commonality (for example, the focus on empathy), where this programme differs is in respect of the emphasis on teaching for understanding (Wiske 1998) rather than, more specifically, on 'the explicit, formal teaching of social-emotional skills' (Humphrey, 2013, 18).

The two key theories which underpin the approach are 'Teaching for Understanding' (Perkins 1998, Wiske 1998) and 'Multiple Intelligence Theory' (Gardner 1995). The 'Teaching for Understanding Framework' places understanding – 'being able to think and act with what one knows' (Perkins 1998, p.40) - at the heart of learning. Understanding is culturally and contextually situated (Bruner and Haste 1987; Gardner 1999): it is framed by time, place and cultural norms and values, and through our individual interpretations of our experiences. The approach links these two theories by focusing on understanding as it pertains to the two personal intelligences – intrapersonal and interpersonal (Gardner 1999). Gardner defines intrapersonal intelligence as, 'the capacity to understand oneself, to have a working model of oneself,' and interpersonal intelligence as, 'a person's capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people, and, consequently, to work effectively with others' (Gardner, 1999, 43), related also to the concept of theory of mind (Astington 1994).

Operation of the Transition Project

The transition project, part of a broader study (cc. methodology), spanned both Primary and Secondary school (mid-April to mid-October) with pupils attending weekly sessions of around one hour. The groups constituted three to five pupils and were led in the Primary school by both the Primary and Secondary SG Leaders. On transition to Secondary school, the group was led by the Secondary SG Leader only with the exception of the initial two meetings when both SG Leaders were present. Pupils were extracted from classes to attend the group.

Support for implementation

SG Leaders, who principally had a learning support background, attended four days of In-Service Training in which they familiarised themselves with the programme. This training included extensive verbal and written guidance about the means of consulting with both parents and pupils as a prelude to seeking formal consent. Each of the six participating Secondary schools and one or two of its associated Primary schools formed a cluster led by a Cluster Leader (normally a senior member of staff who had volunteered) who co-ordinated regular meetings for SG Leaders, enabling the sharing of good practice and providing effective support. Materials were provided for parents, pupils and staff in participating schools. A representative of the senior management team in each participating school attended training (delivered by the research team) to support the introduction of the approach within the school and to foster a whole-school approach. A website, developed and maintained by the research team, supported endeavours.

Nomination and Consultation Processes

With regard to the transition project, pupils were initially nominated by senior staff in their Primary schools, in consultation with class teachers. SG Leaders, together with

the aforementioned staff, selected the pupils to take part in the study. Students were nominated on the basis of two criteria:- the pupil has been experiencing difficulty in coping with the norms of school life and it was considered by nominating staff that the approach could be of potential benefit. It is recognised that these are subjective judgements and it should be noted that there is no imputation of blame in the former (ie. it is not a deficit position). There was a shared understanding that the school environment, in itself, can present as a barrier for some children (Thomas 2014; Learoyd-Smith and Daniels), impacting on their social and emotional development and their behaviour. An analysis of the qualitative data from the nomination forms for the transition project is set out in table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the analysis of qualitative responses derived from nomination forms for the Transition project

Reasons for Referral	Exemplification	Hoped for Gains
Low-level disruption	Talking in class Inappropriate noises	Self-regulation and making good choices Developing understanding of what constitutes acceptable behaviour in different contexts Developing self-respect
Learning-related behaviours	Failing to carry out instructions Inattentive	Improved attitude towards learning Gaining understanding of the importance of education/schooling and learning-focussed behaviours (such as listening in class)
Poor/aggressive behaviour towards others/lack of empathy	Falling out with other children Unkindness towards other children	Forming and maintaining good interpersonal relationships
Failure to take responsibility for behaviour	Blaming others for his/her own misconduct Does not tell the truth	Developing self-responsibility Developing understanding of the impact of negative behaviour on self and others
Internalising behaviours	Quiet and withdrawn	Developing in confidence and self-esteem
Adverse family circumstances	Family break-up	Support over the transition from Primary to Secondary education

In order to form an understanding of the characteristics of pupils within the study and the degree of concern expressed about them, nominating staff were also

asked to rate potential candidates in relation to modified scales for oppositional defiance disorder and conduct disorder. The responses related to the transition project are illustrated in charts 1 & 2.

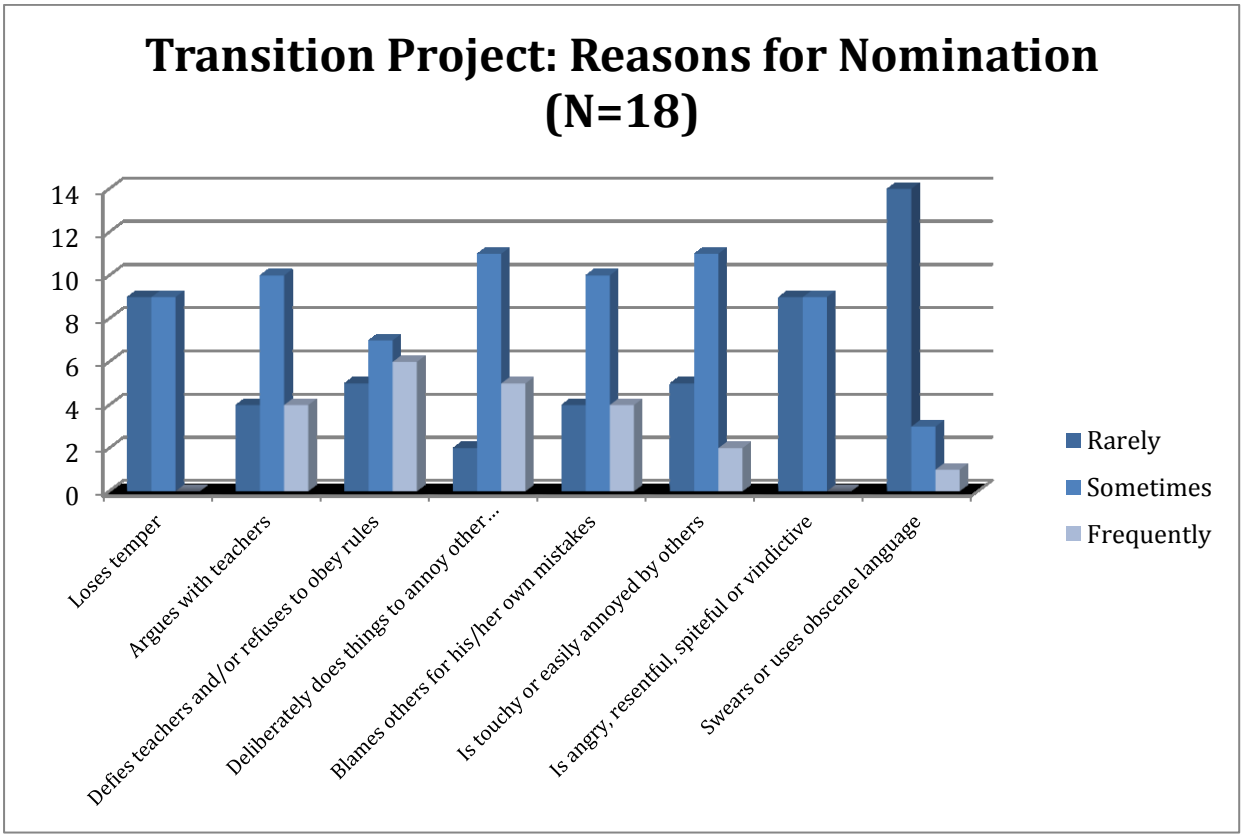

Chart 1: Reasons for Nomination to support group for transition pupils (derived from oppositional defiance disorder) based on responses to a Likert scale

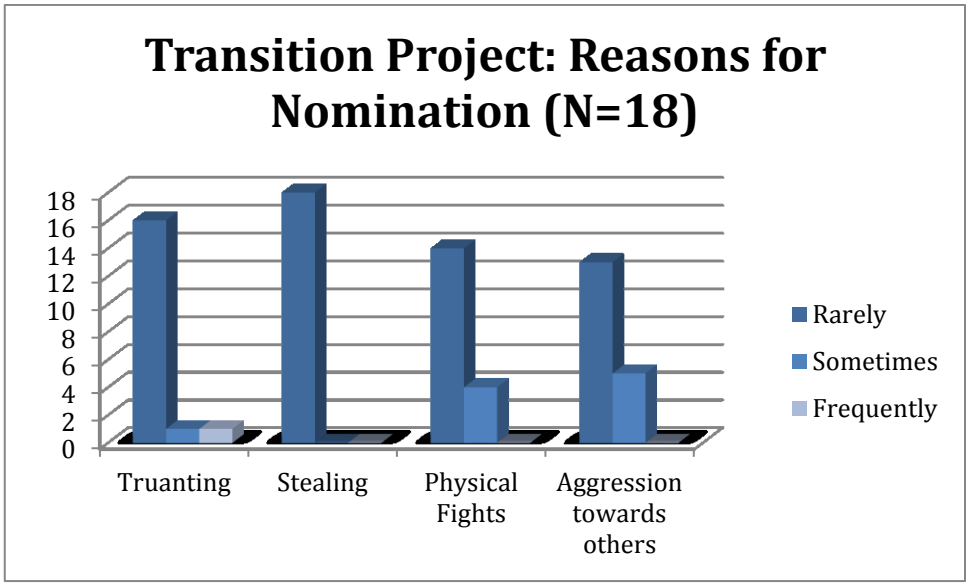

Chart 2: Reasons for Nomination to support group for transition pupils (derived from conduct disorder) based on responses to a Likert scale

On the basis of this information, pupils were then classified as being 'of least concern' (largely included as a preventative measure); 'concern' or 'most concern.' Within the transition project, eight pupils were classified as 'least concern;' seven as 'concern;' and three as 'most concern,' one of whom was an outlier and of extreme concern. As can be seen from table 1, the nature of the concern varied from pupil to pupil, in some cases being related to concerns about the pupil's capacity to cope with the transition – 'quiet and withdrawn' – to more general concerns about behaviour which could lead to under-achievement, poor attendance and the escalation of behavioural problems post-transition and the concordant risks.

An extensive process of consultation took place during which both parents and pupils were issued with information about the intervention and study (in the form of leaflets and letters). Both parents and pupils were invited to a meeting to discuss the pupil's potential involvement in the intervention in which they had an opportunity to look at the materials and ask questions. Some schools took this forward as an information event to which all parents and pupils were invited while others organised individual interviews with the SG Leader at which both the parent and child were present.

Methodology

Research Aims

The study seeks to ascertain the impact (if any) of the intervention on the development of the personal intelligences (RQ1); how this then impacts on pupil outcomes (RQ2); the variables both internal and external to the approach that mediate these outcomes (RQ3); and the implications of this for our understanding of pedagogy, the transition from Primary to Secondary school and the inclusion of children with SEBN (RQ4) (cc. App 1).

The study design

The study is an evaluative mixed-methods case study (Bassey 1999). It comprises three projects – Secondary 2 (S2), Primary 6 (P6) and transition (the last of which is the focus of this paper). The case constitutes all of the study participants and their related stakeholders: 63 support group pupils, 18 of whom are within the transition project. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of the intervention on pupils (addressing RQs 1 & 2) and the variables impacting on pupil progress (RQ3), six individual case studies were conducted across the study as a whole, one of which (Douglas) is drawn from the transition project and explored within this paper. A case study approach was adopted because it allows for an in-depth examination of a singularity within its original setting over time (Bassey 1999; Flyvbjerg 2011; Basit 2010). The study design is encapsulated within figure 1.

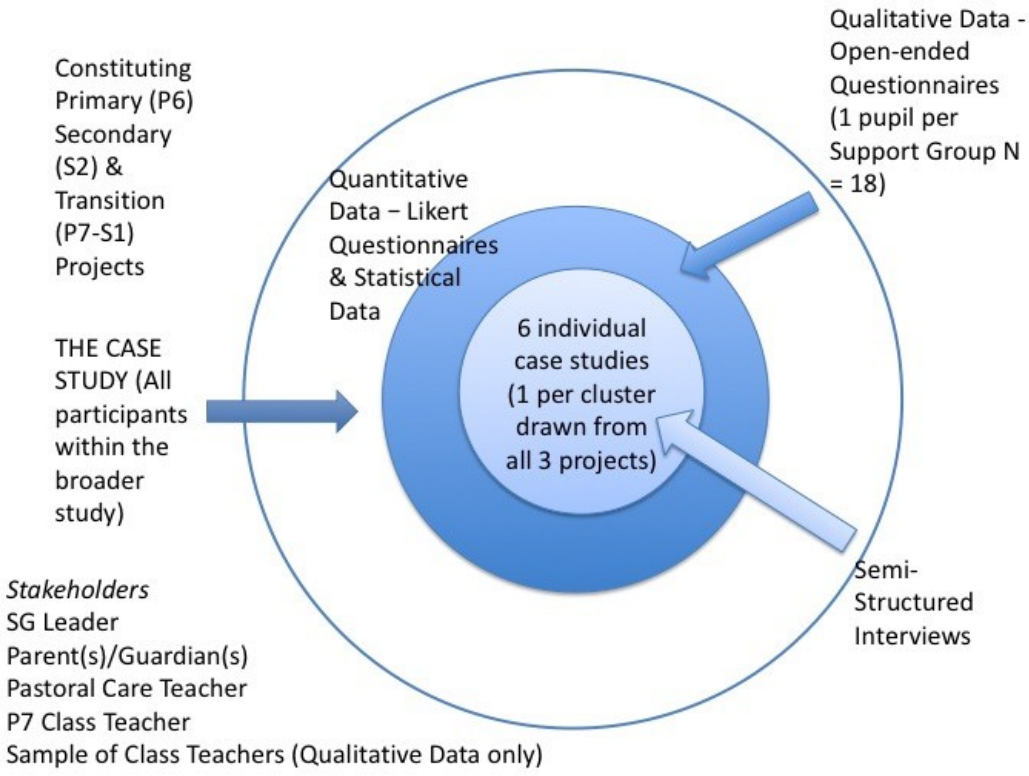

Figure 1: Representation of the study design

The research and development project was managed via a steering group with representation from the research team, the two local authorities and all Cluster Leaders. A highly experienced researcher, independent of the development of the support group approach, acted in a consultancy role, participating also in the steering group.

Selection of pupils to participate within the case studies and open-ended questionnaires

A range of criteria was adopted in the selection of the individual case studies taking account of:

1. The support group attended (which factors in also the local authority, cluster, school and age of the pupil)
2. Gender
3. The degree of concern expressed about the pupil
4. The degree to which it was considered by the SG Leader that the family would be likely/able to participate within the interviews.

After tables had been produced classifying and sorting the pupils within each project according to criteria 1-3, careful judgements were made to achieve a balance in the selection of pupils, representative of the study population as a whole. For example, a ratio of 4:2 boys to girls. Cluster Leaders then consulted with SG Leaders with regard to criterion 4 and a final selection of pupils was made. A similar process was adopted in the selection of pupils (and their related stakeholders) to complete the open-ended questionnaires which were issued to one pupil within each support group.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting research with children, ethical considerations are not just a matter of following agreed procedures (such as obtaining informed consent), they extend to issues relating to power inequalities (between adults and children) and children's rights (Kellett, 2011). The norms of the school culture (where children are expected

largely to conform) and the research culture in which the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw consent thereafter can come into conflict. Given the power relations at play, the responses which pupils offer may be conditioned by the expectations which they hold of what the researcher (particularly within the context of action research) wants to hear (Mowat 2015b). There is also a potential for bias when SG Leaders, in particular, are invested in ensuring successful outcomes for pupils and have been involved in the process of selection of pupils. Within this context, it is very important to triangulate data, drawing from a range of perspectives to afford a more holistic understanding of the case.

The study was conducted in line with SERA guidelines (Scottish Educational Research Association, 2005, 2007) and was informed by the concept of trustworthiness as described by Bassey (1999), drawing from Lincoln and Guba (1985). In addition to what would be described as normal ethical practice (informed consent from all participants with the right to withdraw without detriment; confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed; safeguarding of material ..), as previously described, every effort was made to consult with both parents and children before formal consent was sought through the normal channels.

Methods

It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline the methods adopted to take forward all aspects of the study, therefore this discussion focusses on the semi-structured interviews held with the six case study pupils and their related stakeholders together with the open-ended questionnaires.

Semi-structured interviews Semi-structured interviews (approx. 40 minutes each) using an interview schedule took place with each case study pupil and their related stakeholders immediately after intervention within a quiet location within the

respective schools. With regard to the transition project, this incorporated interviews with the following personnel:- parent(s) or guardian(s); both SG Leaders; and the Secondary Pastoral Care teacher. The interview schedules were initially piloted with SG pupils (other than the case studies) and their stakeholders and modifications made in the light of the pilot.

The questions within the schedules focussed principally upon how the intervention had been experienced by the pupil; the outcomes for the pupil; and the variables both internal to the approach itself and external (eg. support of family) which had impacted upon the progress of the child. The schedules were designed such that fundamentally the same questions were posed across all stakeholders with modifications to the wording to take account of the needs of the respondent (for example, the use of simplified wording for children and less formal language for parents). The interview schedules were customised for each pupil to enable the interviewer to probe the pupil's responses to the pre- and post-intervention Likert questionnaires (designed around eight dimensions directly related to the research questions (cc. Appendix 2)).

In order to ascertain if any changes which had been reported, or observed, were sustainable, one year beyond intervention a further set of retrospective interviews was held with the pupil, the former Secondary SG Leader and the Pastoral Care Teacher of the Secondary school.

As an alternative to asking young pupils and busy teachers to scrutinise transcripts, at the end of each question the interviewer paraphrased the response and asked if it was a true reflection as to what had been said (these passages were excluded from coding). Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Open-ended Questionnaires The open-ended questionnaires were very similar in design to the interview schedules and probed similar areas. With regard to the transition project, they were issued to the SG pupil, parent(s)/guardian(s), the SG Leader (Secondary) and a sample of class teachers – English, Mathematics and a teacher chosen by the pupil on the basis that these were the teachers who would have the greatest familiarity with the pupil.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The data were analysed by means of thematic analysis as described by King and Horrocks (2010) (cc. figure 2).

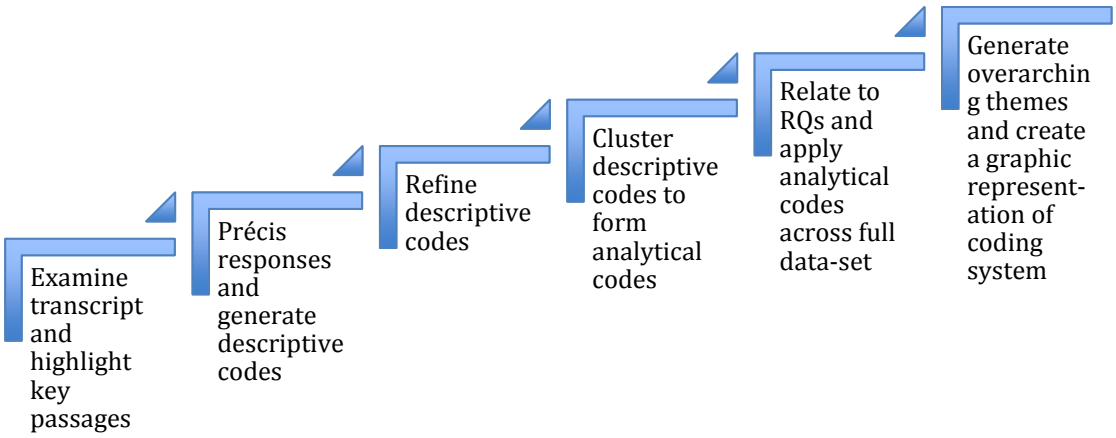

Figure 2: Representation of thematic coding (King & Horrocks, 2010)

This is an iterative process in which complex decisions need to be made as to what constitutes a code and it is important in the initial stage of establishing descriptive codes not to add layers of interpretation. After the initial generation of descriptive codes, a process of pruning, classification and sorting took place in order to generate analytical codes. This process was repeated at the subsequent stage of the analysis until a point of saturation was reached across the data set as a whole. The process is illustrated in table 2, derived from Douglas's case study.

Table 2: Exemplification of coding process, drawing from an extract of an interview transcript

Transcript	Descriptive Comment	Descriptive Code	Analytical Code	Research Question
… even though I'm getting older, I would still actually punch somebody,	Gaining maturity does not in itself lead to greater self-control.	Aggressive behaviour	Degree to which able to exercise self-regulation	RQ2.1
but the Support Group taught me	Has gained insight from participation within SG.	SG promoting reflection	SG promoting intrapersonal intelligence	RQ1.1
how to calm down and walk away from it all.	Able to calm down and avoid conflict.	SG promoting self-regulation.	SG promoting self-regulation	RQ2.1
But there's one thing I can't stand because my wee brother's got a problem with his eyes, but if they make fun of him I can't control it. I've tried, but I would just go up and batter (hit) them.	Still has difficulties in exercising self-control and reacts aggressively in defence of his younger brother who has a disability.	Lack of self-regulation under provocation Empathy	Degree to which able to exercise self-regulation in specific contexts Empathy	RQ2.1 RQ3 RQ2.3

To ensure trustworthiness (Bassey, 1999), an initial moderation exercise took place prior to which each member of the research team analysed the same transcript. In addition, each member of the research team acted as a critical friend to another member of the team. At the end of the process, each of the case studies was returned to the cluster leader for verification and they were scrutinised by researchers external to the project.

Case Study

The case study draws principally from the structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires and Likert scale pre-and post-intervention questionnaires and will be explored primarily from the perspective of the socio-emotional aspects of the transition.

Background information and benchmark measures

Douglas, a 1st year pupil at a Secondary school in central Scotland, lives with his mother, a single parent, and younger brother who is visually impaired. In the absence of his father, he shouldered some of the responsibilities of caring for his younger brother. Two of the areas served by the school fall within the 15% most deprived deciles in Scotland (XXX Council 2016). Douglas had attended two Primary schools and had been very disruptive in his initial school but had settled well into his new Primary school. However, in the six-month period leading up to intervention, concerns had been expressed by teaching staff about his attendance (83%) and behaviour: in particular, his capacity to self-regulate, aggression and failing to take responsibility for his conduct. His class teacher describes him as being withdrawn, stubborn and uncooperative and inclined towards moodiness. He falls within the 'concern' categorisation with regard to the study. On transfer to Secondary school, Douglas was in receipt of learning support.

His pre-intervention self-assessment questionnaire (c.c. App 1) indicates difficulties with self-regulation, relationships with peers, a sense of not being cared about by teachers, and issues around self-esteem and self-efficacy. There are, however, positive indicators, such as his capacity to empathise with others.

Engagement in the support group

Despite initial concerns about participation, Douglas enjoyed the support group, corroborated by his mother and both SG Leaders. He was considered to have responded positively to the target-setting process (although it had made him anxious at times) with the positive reinforcement deriving from it being an important motivational factor in his improvement. He had settled well into Secondary school and had responded positively to the intervention: 'Didn't feel victimised. Didn't feel it was unfair in any way. Quite co-operative' (Mr Taylor, Pastoral Care Teacher).

Gaining Insight through a process of reflection and self-awareness (RQ 1)

Mrs McNair (SG Leader, S1) considered that Douglas had become much more reflective: 'The whole experience has made him think more about his behaviour and how negative behaviour can impact upon learning.' He had developed greater awareness and was 'able to see which other pupils have negative behaviour/display inappropriate behaviour' (ibid.). He had also developed more insight into the association between actions and consequences: 'Because he has had to look in depth at the consequences of negative behaviour he can read situations quickly and modify his behaviour or not involve himself at all' (ibid.), corroborated by one of his class teachers on transfer to Secondary school. His mother had also noticed positive changes in this respect - 'He's understanding what he's actually doing, not just going, "Aye. Whatever."'

One of the key outcomes for Douglas was the insight he had gained into his behaviour: '.. it helped me understand my aggression, like. I hate (it) if people make fun of me, or my family.' Douglas was very protective of his mother and younger brother and resented his father whom he considered had not behaved well towards the family. The discussions in the group had helped him to reflect on these issues: '… and he was able to think about that, think through that, because he is a boy who tends to go with his gut instincts… And that's what was getting him into trouble.' (Mrs Roberts, SG Leader P7).

Impact on self-regulation (RQ2.1)

Douglas's growing insight into his behaviour had encouraged him to 'think before he acts': '..he calls me fat and that, but I just ignore him ... .' However, he still had difficulty at times in controlling his anger, especially when other children made fun of

his younger brother. According to Douglas, both of his SG Leaders and a class teacher, his behaviour in class had improved with his interactions being more learning focussed: 'He is more aware of how he shouldn't react and what he shouldn't do … he distances himself from it' (Mrs McNair).

Douglas's mother had noted significant changes in her son's behaviour at home: 'Before he used to just say, "I'm not doing nothing", if I asked him to help me … He's being more polite and everything now and helping me about the house because I'm a single Mum.'

Impact on interpersonal relationships and empathy (RQs2.2. & 2.3)

Douglas attributed the positive changes in his relationships with peers to the support group: '… as soon as I went to that (the support group) I started calming down.' A very positive aspect was the relationship he had formed with his two SG Leaders and he drew on this on transition: '… she used to be the only person I knew in the High school and I used to just ask loads and loads of questions … .'

On transfer to Secondary school, two of his class teachers observed that Douglas had formed good relationships with them and with his peers and was more empathetic in his relationships: 'Douglas has gone from shouting out in class to listening to others.' However, on a more negative note, an area of concern for Douglas was his relationships with male teachers which could be problematic.

Mrs Roberts considered that the discussions and activities within the support group had helped Douglas to see things from the teacher's perspective, fostering empathy, and had also fostered a greater understanding and tolerance for each other among pupils in the group.

Douglas's mother observed that his relationship with his younger brother had improved: 'They're not fighting any more,' corroborated also by Douglas, who was

behaving in a more tolerant way towards him. However, she expressed concern that her son was being bullied on his way to and from school and that this was making him reluctant to go to school. She also noted that not all of his relationships with teachers were positive and that he could be quite sensitive to criticism.

The development of self-esteem and confidence (RQ2.4)

Whereas Mrs Roberts (Primary) saw Douglas as largely confident, Mrs McNair (Secondary) saw him as a child who was lacking in self-esteem, who needed a lot of re-assurance and who tended to be rather hard on himself. Both SG Leaders considered that the small-group setting had been beneficial to him and helped to reassure him about the transition: 'I think he responds well in a smaller group. He's more comfortable. He knows that what he's going to say is not going to be put down in any way.' (Mrs McNair)

Douglas was very sensitive about his weight and how other pupils reacted to him in respect of it. He talked about 'carrying a big bulk'. He had tried to ignore the comments of other children: 'I used to be really scared. Just tried to forget them all I could, but I always wore really baggy clothes.' Douglas's Mum, whilst having noted improvements in his self-esteem and confidence, was concerned that the bullying incidents and negative comments about his weight were 'setting him right back. … They call him four-eyes and things like that', and having a negative impact upon his progress within the support group.

Value and worth of intervention and other outcomes (RQs 3& 4)

Douglas was clear that the intervention had been of benefit to him and had promoted inclusion: 'They should keep it open, keep it up, because it's helped me a lot, as you hear, and it's just like one of the best things that's happened to XXX (the school)

because, without that, I think I would just kind of be expelled right now.' Douglas's Mum endorsed her son's perspective and stated, 'I would just like to say thanks for helping and long may it continue.' Both SG Leaders considered the intervention, in general, to be of value and of benefit to Douglas in particular and they both expressed a desire for greater involvement in the work. His Pastoral Care teacher considered that the quality of staff working with Douglas had made a difference for him. Douglas's attendance improved post-transition (90% rather than 83%) and there were no indicators of indiscipline during the period of intervention, which corroborates the positive picture emerging from qualitative data. There were substantial changes of a positive nature in Douglas's self-assessment carried out post-intervention across a wide range of domains. Only four indicators (out of 45) were rated more negatively than before (cc. App 2).

Reflecting on the experience of participation one year on

In the interim period between Douglas's participation in the support group and the retrospective interview one year later, his mother, on the advice of the research team, brought her concerns about bullying to the attention of the school. However, concerned that the bullying had not resolved despite the best efforts of the school, she had moved him to another Secondary school, which his older cousins attended.

Douglas had continued to build upon the improvements evidenced. From his perspective, the key outcome had been the development of his capacity to listen to and be respectful of others. Important aspects of the approach for him had been the sense of being cared about and listened to: 'A teacher who's nice to you and cares about you - I was able to express myself. More important than rewards' (of which he was disparaging); and the safety which the group afforded: '… people would listen and help. Everything was kept secret - nobody was blurbing out everything.' He no

longer required learning support: 'I'm independent now. The support group had a lot to do with it. It basically taught me how to learn rather than being a twat.'

The transition to his new Secondary school had not been unproblematic: a few serious incidents between Douglas and other boys had arisen which brought into question Douglas's judgement. However, his new Pastoral Care Teacher considered that Douglas had coped well and had demonstrated a capacity to reflect on and take responsibility for his behaviour, unusual in a boy of his age:

> And he's, he's very honest. I mean if he does mess up he'll be straight up coming to me saying, "Well, this is what happened, Mr Burton. I know I shouldn't have done it…" And he'll very methodically, very clearly be able to see how it began, recognise where he got wound up and recognise… but, you know, a lot of the responses we get from kids is, "It wasnae my fault. That person made me do it." But Douglas is very honest … "I shouldn't have done it."
>
> Mr Burton, Pastoral Care Teacher, S2

He talked about the reason for Douglas's transfer to the school and his concern that a situation might break out if Douglas's elder cousins attempted to protect him. However, Douglas had acted on the guidance offered and had exercised self-restraint. He had joined the school's rugby team and turned his back on boys seeking to fight with him.

Reflections on the Case Study (RQs 3 & 4)

The transition process had presented both opportunities and challenges (Coffey 2013) for Douglas and it also represented a *critical* period which can determine the trajectory of the child (Brewin and Statham 2011). What is being described above is a complex set of circumstances that indicate that no single lens would be helpful in understanding the transition process as it had been experienced by Douglas and a systems (bio-ecological) perspective may be of value in this respect (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006).

> Bronfenbrenner proposed that children constantly grow, change, engage with multiple systems, and are active participants in their development as a result of reciprocal interactions between individual characteristics and their environments.
>
> Brewin & Statham, 2011: 369

The transition to Secondary school corresponds to the many changes associated with adolescence (Hanewald 2013; Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013; McGee et al. 2003) and Douglas was not immune to this. At a time when children are striving to become more independent of their parents and adults in general, peer relationships assume a greater importance (Topping 2011). Issues pertaining to body image (Vilhjalmsson, Kristjansdottir, and Ward 2012) and acceptance within the peer group (Coffey 2013; Kenny, Dooley, and Fitzgerald 2013; Lester and Cross 2014) become more pertinent. This was clearly an issue for Douglas who had been taunted about his weight.

One of the most prominent concerns of children both prior to and after the transition is bullying (Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008; West, Sweeting, and Young 2010; McGee et al. 2003; Topping 2011; Zeedyk et al. 2003; Symonds 2015). It has been established that boys are just as likely to experience verbal and relational bullying as girls and, indeed, to a more severe extent (Lester and Cross 2014). Further, they have fewer support mechanisms than girls upon which to draw (Kenny, Dooley, and Fitzgerald 2013). It is evident that neither Douglas, nor his mother, had informed the school about this until after the point at which the initial interview was conducted which raises questions about the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies which are heavily reliant upon self-disclosure. Given that Waters et al. (2012) have identified the transition as being a critical period in which to counter bullying and to identify children at risk, this is clearly of concern.

Douglas saw himself as standing in for his absent father to protect both his mother and his younger brother whom he perceived as vulnerable. It could be argued

that Douglas's protective instinct towards his family is one of his key strengths (it demonstrates his care, compassion and empathy for his younger brother in particular) but it was also his 'Achilles heel'. In such situations, the self-regulation that he was able to exercise in many other contexts (as witness accounts indicate) came under threat. It may also be surmised that the difficult relationship which he had with his father and the lack of a positive male role-model in his life (Deuchar 2009) may have underlain some of the difficulties he experienced in his relationships with male teachers. However, even in situations in which Douglas was not able to exercise self-control, one of the significant findings to emerge from the study is the capacity that he had developed to reflect upon his behaviour and take responsibility for it.

One of the key aspects of this case study is the very positive, trusting relationship that emerged between Douglas and his two SG Leaders. What may have been particularly of the essence was the opportunity that the support group afforded for him to form a close relationship with the teacher who would ultimately support him on transition. This is in keeping with the importance of a 'significant other' in the life of a child (Leung 2010) and an ethos of care, and strong support mechanisms across the transition (Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013). However, it is also evident from his mother's account that relationships with teachers could be problematic for her son and that he was very sensitive to what he perceived to be adverse criticism (a finding replicated in Leung's study of low-achieving pupils).

In summary, it is evident that, whilst Douglas had made some significant errors of judgement on transfer to his new (second) Secondary school, participation within the support group had enabled him to develop both intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences which had given him the insight and resilience he needed to be able to cope with the situations in which he had found himself.

Discussion and Conclusions

In bringing together the main threads to emerge from the case study, this discussion addresses Research Questions 3 & 4, examining the variables (internal and external to the approach) which have impacted on pupil progress and the implications of such in terms of informing policy and practice with regard to pedagogy, the transition process from Primary to Secondary school and supporting children with SEBN across the transition.

The importance of relationships and the promotion of a sense of belonging

One of the principal indicators of a successful transition is that a child has been enabled to thrive within the new environment. A caring school ethos and the promotion of positive relationships and networks can promote a sense of belonging/affiliation (Prince and Hadwin 2013; Bossaert et al. 2013; McGee et al. 2003) and connectedness (Lester, Waters, and Cross 2013) to school, associated with a wide range of positive indicators related to mental health and wellbeing, leading to better attainment outcomes (Riglin et al. 2013). Trusting, respectful and affirmative relationships between teachers and pupils are an important aspect of achieving this end (Tobbell and O'Donnell 2013; Mowat 2010a) and it is evident from this specific case study that this emerged as an important variable for Douglas.

Symonds (2015) classifies fifteen programmes offering social support to children across the transition from Primary-to-Secondary school (table 11.3) but none offer the continuity and progression in terms of pedagogy and socio-emotional support afforded by *Supporting Positive Futures and Transitions.* In each case, the support for transition either took place prior to or after transition but none bridged the transition itself. Only one drew data from children, parents and teachers and only a

few studies followed up on the progress of the pupils beyond the initial evaluation. As such, whilst small in scale, this study is more comprehensive in approach than many comparable studies. As exemplified in the case study, the continuity of support afforded by the transition project helped Douglas to develop a greater affinity with the new school, fostering a sense of belonging at a time when children are dealing with issues related to identity, self-esteem, competence and social support (as identified by Symonds (2015) (table 1.1.1) and negotiating the 'rites of passage' of the Primary-Secondary transition (Margetts and Kienig 2013; West, Sweeting, and Young 2010).

Many of the approaches adopted by schools in supporting children across the transition are universal (for example, induction days) but to what extent can universal approaches meet the needs of pupils whose capacity to build affirmative relationships with adults has been impaired by previous adverse encounters (as was the case with Douglas) and/or who have already been identified in Primary school as having difficulty in coping with the norms of school life? The Adverse Childhood Experiences study (National Health Service 2017), in keeping with the findings of other studies (Lloyd, Stead, and Kendrick 2001; Mowat 2010b), identified that it may only take one person to make a positive difference in a child's life. Within the setting of a whole class and the multiple contacts with different teachers over the course of a school day in Secondary school, pupils who have experienced trauma are unlikely to be able to express their anxieties or concerns and to form positive relationships with teachers. What the support group approach affords is a more intimate forum for discussion and learning in which, over time, trusting, affirmative relationships can be established within the group and in which children feel that they are listened to and cared about in a non-judgemental way and can support each other.

However, this does not imply that participation within *SPFT* is an easy process for pupils. Whilst Douglas seems to have embraced the intervention from the outset, for some children in the study, there is initial trepidation and for a few, a sense of "why me?" In one cluster in particular, it was recognised that, whilst procedures had been followed, more effort needed to be devoted to ensuring that pupils had a full understanding as to why they had been nominated for intervention. The role of the SG Leader and other supportive adults emerges as being crucial in alleviating anxieties in this respect. It also needs to be acknowledged that the very act of identifying children as being in need of additional support carries with it the concordant risks of potential stigmatisation and labelling but this needs to be balanced against the risks of not intervening and the potential benefits to be accrued from intervention (Kauffman 2014, Mowat 2015c).

The importance of high quality pedagogy, progression across the transition and a whole school approach

Relationships matter but so does high quality pedagogy. The focus on teaching for understanding - the purpose of which is to help children to 'make the connections' between their learning and practical applications within their daily lives (Perkins (1992) - had fostered in Douglas the reflective capacities and insight that enabled him to apply insights gained from his participation within *SPFT* to the broader aspects of his life and to new contexts with (mostly) good judgement, if not in all sets of circumstances. An important aspect of this had been the continuity in approach and progression in learning afforded by *SPFT.* This is dependent on support and clear direction from the senior leadership team; a willingness to direct resources towards supporting the transition; commitment from staff; and investment in high quality staff development and in fostering partnerships and engagement with parents.

The implications for schools and the research community

The implications of the above are that schools need to examine the extent to and ways in which their policies, systems and structures to support the Primary-Secondary transition act to either facilitate or hinder the development of positive relationships and a sense of belonging/connectedness to/affiliation with school for pupils who have been identified as potentially 'at risk' on transition (and, in particular, those with SEBN) and the degree to which the ethos and culture of the school support this. Whilst much attention is devoted by schools to curricular continuity on the transition (Symonds 2015), how do schools ensure that their anti-bullying policies are effective; that staff are well informed and understand the importance of the socio-emotional aspects of transition; that pedagogies support the development of socio-emotional learning; and that schools are fully engaging parents and partner organisations in supporting the transition for pupils? There is a need for further comprehensive research on how the Primary-Secondary transition is experienced by children potentially at risk and how schools can best support this process.

Limitations

It is recognised that the transition project is a sub-set of the broader study and therefore is small in scope. However, many of the findings to emerge from the transition project are also mirrored in the findings to emerge from the study as a whole, such as the importance of affirmative relationships and the promotion of a sense of belonging. Whilst case study research does not set out to establish universal truths, what it can do is to provide a depth of understanding, illuminating the complex web of interactions which combine to create the circumstances around the case, which can help others in similar contexts to gain insight into their own specific set of

circumstances. Recognition of the situated nature of policy and practice and the importance of cultural context in implementing change (James 2009, Fullan 2008) indicates that a cautious approach needs to be adopted in advocating the adoption of policy and practice from one context to another.

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Appendix 1

Research Questions (relevant to this paper)

Research Question 1

To what extent (if any) have pupils developed further:

RQ1.1 intrapersonal intelligence (understanding of self)
RQ1.2 interpersonal intelligence (understanding of others)?

Research Question 2

To what extent (if any) has this impacted upon pupils':

RQ2.1 capacity to regulate their behaviour with good judgement in a range of contexts

RQ2.2 capacity to form and maintain effective interpersonal relationships

RQ2.3 capacity for empathy

RQ2.4 self-esteem and confidence

RQ2.5 dispositions towards learning and school and sense of self-efficacy in learning[1]

Research Question 3

RQ3.1 What are the variables (internal and external to the approach) which have impacted upon pupil progress?

Research Question 4

What can be learned from the study to inform policy and practice in the following areas?

RQ4.1 Pedagogy

RQ4.2 The transition process from Primary to Secondary

RQ4.3 The inclusion of and support for pupils with SEBN in mainstream schools?

[1] Not explored through qualitative data within this paper

Appendix 2

Pre-/Post-Intervention Self-Assessment Questionnaire		Pre-Intervention			Post-Intervention		
		Very Like Me	Quite Like Me	Not Like Me	Very Like Me	Quite Like Me	Not Like Me
Intrapersonal Intelligence RQ1.1	I am aware of my feelings - I know when I am happy, angry or upset	x				x	
	I understand why I am happy, angry or upset		x		x		
	I know the difference between right and wrong	x			x		
	I understand my behaviour		x		x		
Interpersonal Intelligence RQ1.2	I understand that other people can think and feel differently about things than me	x			x		
	I am good at knowing how other people are thinking and feeling	x			x		
	I am good at understanding other people's behaviour – why they behave as they do		x		x		
Self-regulation and conceptions of behaviour RQ2.1	I behave well in school		x		x		
	I am happy and relaxed about how I behave	x			x		
	I know how I am supposed to behave at school and at home	x			x		
	I find it hard to keep calm when I am upset or angry		x				x
	I can control my behaviour when I want to			x	x		
	I know how to improve upon my behaviour if I want to		x		x		
	I want to improve my behaviour		x			x	
Interpersonal Relationships – Peers RQ.2.2	I make friends easily			x	x		
	I get on well with my friends - we don't fall out much			x	x		
	I am usually friendly towards other pupils		x		x		
	I think that other pupils are usually friendly towards me		x			x	
Interpersonal Relationships – Teachers RQ2.2	I get on well with my teachers	x			x		
	I think that most of my teachers like me	x			x		
	I think that most of my teachers are fair		x		x		
	I try to show respect towards my teachers		x		x		
	I think that most of my teachers treat me with respect		x		x		
	I can talk to some of my teachers	x			x		

	I think that most of my teachers care about me			x	x		
Empathy RQ2.3	I can see things from someone else's point of view	x			x		
	If I'm watching something happening on a TV programme, I can imagine how I would feel it if happened to me	x			x		
	When something bad happens to other people, I feel sad		x				x
	I am kind towards other people who are in trouble	x			x		
	I try to help other people			x	x		
	I am concerned about how my behaviour affects others	x			x		
Self-esteem and confidence RQ2.4	I feel good about myself most of the time			x	x		
	If something good happens, it makes me feel more confident	x			x		
	If something bad happens, it can make me feel less sure of myself	x			x		
	If other people praise me, it makes me feel more confident			x	x		
	If other people criticise me, it can make me feel less sure of myself	x			x		
Dispositions towards learning and school/sense of self-efficacy in learning RQ2.5	I think of myself as being quite intelligent			x			x
	I think that my intelligence can grow if I work hard			x	x		
	I think of myself as being a good learner		x		x		
	I think that its more important to do my best than to get good marks			x	x		
	I can work at a problem until I get it right			x	x		
	I ask for help when I get stuck	x			x		
	I like learning		x			x	
	I like school		x			x	
	I think that education is important if I am to do well in my life	x				x	